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SUBJECT: IRANIAN COMMUNITY IN GERMANY FOCUSED ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Classified By: Political M/C George Glass for reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: Germany's Iranian exile community is focused on the Iranian government's human rights abuses and what they see as the lack of sufficient international response both from the U.S. and from the EU. In recent conversations with poloff Iranian exiles living in Germany expressed their frustration at the focus of the West on the Iranian nuclear issue instead of on the human rights issue which they see as more pressing. They generally questioned whether continuing to offer to engage with the current Iranian government meant that no real pressure would be put on the Iranian government for human rights violations for fear of thwarting what they view as the very slim chance of a negotiated settlement to the nuclear issue. Some ideas offered included (1) suggesting UNSYG Ban ask to visit Iran during the upcoming February 2-11 events and (2) encouraging Turkey to send Iran a strong message on human rights. End Summary.

Sadr: Calls for Consequences for Human Rights Violators

12. (C) Well known Iranian lawyer and women's rights activist Shadi Sadr pressed for the U.S. and the EU to be more active in condemning Iranian Human Rights abuses and following words up with concrete actions, in a January 18 conversation with poloff. She asked what concrete consequences the Iranian regime was being asked to pay as a result for their role in human rights violations. She said the Iranian population would be more willing to suffer the burden of sanctions if they knew that they were being levied against the government for its human rights violations and not on account of the nuclear issue. She said that while she agreed that nuclear weapons were fundamentally a human rights issue, the Iranian population at large isn't making that connection.

13. (C) She pointed to the upcoming 10-day February demonstrations marking the 31st anniversary of the Iranian Revolution's "victory" as a period of potential conflict. She reiterated Iranian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi's suggestion that UNSYG visit Iran and suggested that the February 2-11 time period might be a good one to consider for such a visit. She thought the regime would be too embarrassed to refuse his request and the international attention around his visit would prevent excess violence/repression on the part of the government against the demonstrators. She also noted that many Iranian human rights activists were planning to travel to Geneva prior to Iran's February UPR at the HRC on February 15 to plead their case with the UN HRC and at the various missions and relevant NGOs. Note. A Berlin based Iranian activist told poloff that two busses were going from Berlin alone. End Note.

Kermani: Iranian Street Doubts U.S. Sincerity

¶4. (C) Navid Kermani, a prominent German-Iranian writer, Islamic scholar, and philosopher who is well-respected amongst the German MFA policy planners and intellectuals within the German-Iranian community shared Shadr's general criticism with the West's continuation of the engagement policy, as have numerous other Iranian contacts in Germany. He said he had been a big supporter of the Obama administration's engagement policy before the June 12 elections, but said it was time to reevaluate our goals. He noted that the Iranian people themselves were starting to ask on whose side the Obama administration really stood, and quoted the slogan chanted by opposition demonstrators in Tehran in the fall as symbolic of the disillusionment felt by Iranians with the current U.S. policy: "Obama, ou ba ma ya ounha?" (Obama, is he with us, or with them?) Kermani stressed that there is a palpable fear amongst Iranian activists that if nuclear negotiations succeed, the world will forget the human rights issues. There is doubt within the Iranian population on the sincerity of the U.S. solidarity with the people.

Suggestions: Messaging

¶5. (C) Kermani said the Iranian people have a hard time understanding why the West doesn't have a problem with Indian, Pakistani or Israeli nuclear weapons, but only with the Iranian nuclear program. While Kermani himself

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understands the complexities of the NPT regime, he said it carried no weight in the "Iranian street." He suggested the West might go a long way towards convincing the Iranian public of our mission if we could separate the Iranian government from the people in our messaging. He suggested saying that as long as this regime continues to violate the basic human rights of its citizens they can't be trusted with nuclear weapons.

Bring Turkey Into The Debate

¶6. (C) Kermani suggested that the U.S. and EU should urge Turkey to play a bigger role in pressuring the Iranian government to cease its human rights violations. He argued that the pressure to respect human rights should in general come from the global community and not just from the West, but he said Turkey might be able to play a particularly constructive role. As one of Iran's closest neighbors and a fellow Muslim country, he argued, Turkish criticism was likely to carry more weight.

Isolation in International Fora

¶7. (C) Kermani was in Iran when Ahmadinejad's anti-Israeli rhetoric prompted a walk-out during the April 2009 UN Racism conference. He said that kind of international solidarity had great weight inside of Iran. It was a shame, he continued, that such solidarity couldn't have been maintained this past fall during Ahmadinejad's UNGA remarks. He suggested the IC consider more similar demonstrations of solidarity in its isolation of the Iranian government in response to the excessive human rights violations.

¶8. (C) Comment. Shadr and Kermani's opinions echo those of many Iranian contacts with whom poloff has had contact in recent weeks. End Comment.
Murphy